

**II. Amendment to the Claims**

This listing and version of the claims replaces all prior listings and versions of the claims.

1. (previously presented) A rectangular siding panel having front and rear faces and a pair of side faces, said panel having a thickened portion proximate a top end of said panel forming a protruding first area in said rear face having a continuous planar first face extending between the side faces that is shaped to sit substantially flush with a portion of a vertical wall when said siding panel is secured to said vertical wall and angled to overlap at least a portion of a second siding panel secured to said vertical wall with said rear face including a portion proximate to a bottom end of said rear face resting upon a front face of said second siding panel, said portion of said rear face proximate to said bottom end having a planar second face extending from said bottom end to near to said first area.

2. (original) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said siding panel is a clapboard siding panel.

3. (original) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said siding panel is a fiber cement or wood clapboard siding panel.

4. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said first area comprises a reinforced area comprising a mesh, scrim, fabric or panel reinforcement.

5. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said planar second face is a continuously planar face extending between the side faces.

6. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein said planar first face has a height of about at least one inch.

7. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 1, wherein, when said planar first face sits substantially flush with said portion of said vertical wall when said rear face

overlaps said second siding panel, a major portion of said rear face forms an angle with said vertical wall between about 1-10 degrees.

8. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 4, wherein said siding panel is formed from fiber cement and said reinforcement is embedded within or laminated to said siding panel.

9. (previously presented) A siding panel assembly, comprising:

at least first and second siding panels attached to a vertical wall of a structure, each of said siding panels being a rectangular shaped panel having front and rear faces and a pair of side faces, said first siding panel angled to overlap at least a portion of said second siding panel, said rear face of at least said first siding panel having a reinforced area proximate to a top end of said rear face shaped such that at least a portion of said area sits substantially flush with a portion of said vertical wall, wherein said siding panels are secured to said vertical wall at least in part by a series of fasteners extending through said respective siding panels and into said vertical wall, wherein at least some of said fasteners are disposed through said reinforced area,

wherein said reinforced area includes a continuous planar first face that contacts said portion of said vertical wall and extends between said side faces.

10. (previously presented) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said reinforced area comprises an embedded or laminated mesh, scrim, fabric or panel reinforcement.

11. (original) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said siding panels are fiber cement clapboard siding panels.

12. (original) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said siding panels are installed using a blind nail method using a plurality of nails and at least some of said nails are disposed through said reinforced area.

13. (original) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said siding panels are installed using a face nail method using a plurality of nails and at least some of said nails are disposed through said reinforced area.

14. (canceled)

15. (previously presented) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said planar first face has a height of at least about one inch.

16. (original) The assembly of claim 9, wherein said planar first face extends from a top edge of said first siding panel at an angle that substantially matches an angle between a major portion of said rear face of said first panel and said wall created by said overlap.

17. (currently amended) A method of installing a siding panel assembly on a vertical wall of a structure, comprising the following steps:

providing at least first and second siding panels, each of said siding panels being a rectangular shaped panel having front and rear faces and a pair of side faces, said rear face of at least said first siding panel having a first area proximate to a top end of said rear face shaped such that at least a portion of said area sits substantially flush with a portion of said vertical wall when said first siding panel is secured to said wall and angled to overlap at least a portion of said second siding panel; and

attaching said first and second siding panels to said structure such that a rear face of said first siding panel partially overlaps a front face of said second siding panel with said rear face including a portion proximate to a bottom end of said rear face resting upon a front face of said second siding panel,

wherein said first area includes a continuous planar first face that contacts said portion of said vertical wall and extends between said side faces, and

wherein said attaching step utilizes a face nail attachment method comprising driving a series of nails through said first siding panel, through said continuous planar first face and into said vertical wall.

18. (canceled)

19. (previously presented) The method of claim 17, wherein:

said attaching step utilizes a blind nail attachment method.

20. (canceled)

21. (canceled)

22. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein said siding panels are clapboard siding panels.

23. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein said siding panels are fiber cement clapboard siding panels.

24. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein said first area includes a planar face that contacts said portion of said vertical wall and a major portion of said rear face forms an angle with said vertical wall between about 1-10 degrees.

25. (previously presented) A rectangular shaped clapboard siding panel having front and rear faces, said rear face having a first area proximate to a top end of said rear face shaped such that at least a portion of said first area sits substantially flush with a portion of a vertical wall when said siding panel is secured to said vertical wall and angled to overlap at least a portion of a second siding panel secured to said vertical wall, such that said vertical wall provides support for said rear face when fasteners are driven through said clapboard siding panel and into said vertical wall through said first area, wherein said first area comprises an embedded or laminated reinforcement layer.

26. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 25, wherein said first area includes a planar face that is disposed to sit substantially flush with said portion of said vertical wall when said rear face overlaps said second siding panel such that a major portion of said rear face forms an angle with said vertical wall between about 1-10 degrees.

27. (previously presented) A clapboard siding panel having front and rear faces and a longitudinal length, said rear face having a first portion forming an oblique angle with respect to a vertical wall to which said siding panel is affixed, said rear face of said siding panel also including a second portion which is disposed in substantially continuous flush contact with said vertical wall along said longitudinal length when said siding panel is affixed to said vertical wall such that said vertical wall provides support for said rear face when fasteners are driven through said clapboard siding panel and into said vertical wall through said second portion, wherein said rear face has bottom and top ends and said first portion forms a planar surface extending from said bottom end to a location proximate to said second portion.

28. (previously presented) The clapboard siding panel of claim 27, wherein said first portion forms a continuously planar surface extending along said longitudinal length from said bottom end to a location proximate to said second portion.

29. (previously presented) The clapboard siding panel of claim 27, wherein said clapboard siding panel is a fiber cement siding panel.

30. (previously presented) The siding panel of claim 25, wherein said siding panel is a fiber cement siding panel.